

Talking Ethics



Upholding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Is an Ethical Responsibility

by Donna Wells, BA, RDH, CDHA manager of professional practice • dwells@cdha.ca

In September 2024, CDHA released a revised version of the *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics*,¹ integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles into its guidance for the profession. As self-regulated health professionals, dental hygienists have an ethical responsibility not only to stay current with evolving codes of ethics but also to incorporate them into daily practice, ensuring a safe, non-judgmental environment for our clients/patients.

When updating the *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics*, CDHA's first decision was to change "client" to "client/patient" to better align with the terminology used by dental hygienists in their practice environments.

At the heart of the 2024 revisions is the following statement:

"Dental hygienists believe that access to oral health care and services is the right of each client/patient. They strive for equitable access to oral health services without regard to age, race, culture, ethnicity, religious or spiritual practice, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, citizenship or socioeconomic status."^{1, p3}

The ethical principles described in the code were updated to reflect the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion inherent in this statement. These principles may already be integrated into dental hygienists' practices; if not, they guide how to incorporate them.



The additions to the principles are as follows:

BENEFICENCE

- ▶ Dental hygienists understand that each client/patient comes with their own lived experience and must be respected and cared for with empathy, free of judgment or bias.
- ▶ Dental hygienists take the time to actively listen to the client's/patient's needs and concerns with empathy, free from judgment or bias, to ensure the delivery of culturally appropriate dental hygiene care.
- ▶ Dental hygienists engage in lifelong learning in the quest to continue to build one's cultural competencies.

AUTONOMY

- ▶ Dental hygienists recognize cultural diversity in the assessment and planning of interventions with individuals and populations receiving their services relative to the cultural context in a safe and humble manner.

Continued...

>>>> Talking Ethics

Upholding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion...cont'd

INTEGRITY

- ▶ [Integrity] includes the promotion of fairness and social justice with inclusive and equitable consideration for more vulnerable clients/patients.
- ▶ Dental hygienists respect the human rights and dignity of every client/ patient by promoting conditions that acknowledge and support their social, economic, and cultural values.
- ▶ Dental hygienists use self-reflection and self-discovery in a way that genuinely attempts to understand a client's/patient's identities to help build a trustworthy, honest, and respectful relationship between them and the client's/patient's caregiver(s).

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- ▶ The title of this principle was changed to include privacy, which refers to the individual's rights to control their personal information.

To offer further guidance on potential ethical challenges, the *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics* includes appendices that define ethical distress, dilemmas, and violations, outline the steps required for ethical decision making, and provide instructions for reporting suspected unethical conduct.

Incorporating this latest edition of CDHA's *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics* into your professional practice is an ethical imperative for all dental hygienists. By embracing these principles, dental hygienists uphold the highest standards of their profession and ensure that their practice is inclusive and equitable for all patients. This commitment to DEI enhances the quality of care and strengthens the trust and rapport between dental hygienists and their diverse clients/patients. As the profession continues to evolve, embracing DEI principles will be crucial in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population and upholding the highest ethical standards.

Reference

1. Canadian Dental Hygienists Association. *Dental hygienists' code of ethics*. Ottawa (ON): CDHA; 2024. Available from: files.cdha.ca/Profession/Resources/Code_of_Ethics_EN_web.pdf

